

The Issue

Although sexual harm and rape have reached epidemic proportions, our response to these crimes remains dismal. Every two minutes, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.¹¹ Approximately 17.7 million women and 2.78 million men in the United States have been victims of attempted or completed rape.¹² But sexual assault is consistently underreported because survivors fear—with good reason—that they will be ostracized, blamed, and not believed. Research demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of rapes are never reported (some estimate that only 5% of sexual assault survivors report the crime to the police) and perpetrators are rarely apprehended, let alone prosecuted. Health consequences of sexual harm include physical injury, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy. Long-term consequences of sexual harm include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and panic attacks, depression, social phobia, substance abuse, obesity, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide.

Demand Change

Everyday Actions

1. If a friend discloses an assault to you, start by believing. Tell your friend he or she is not to blame, and work with them to identify options. Help your friend contact your local rape crisis hotline to hear more about access to medical, legal, and counseling services. The Chicago rape crisis hotline is 1-888-293-2080, and the national RAINN hotline is 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673).
2. If you hear someone blaming a victim or repeating the myth that girls and women frequently lie about being raped, correct them. Explain that rape is mostly not reported, rather than lied about. No one deserves to be raped, and the only person to blame is the perpetrator.
3. Donate sweatpants and sweatshirts to local rape crisis counseling services. Because many survivors leave their clothes with police for evidence in the emergency room, centers have these available for survivors to wear home.

Raise Awareness

4. Be vocal about the realities of rape. Many people believe that it is a rare occurrence, but 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will be sexually harmed before the age of 18.¹³ Raise awareness among your friends, family, and colleagues.
5. Consider hosting an event during Sexual Assault Awareness Month (April) to provide a forum for people to share their knowledge about the incidence and impact of sexual violence.
6. Educate yourself and others about Rape Trauma Syndrome, a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Not only could this information be useful when talking to someone who has experienced sexual violence, but it also helps dispel myths about the link between “false reporting” and some survivors’ difficulty in remembering the exact details or chronology of their assault. Learn more at www.rapevictimagocates.org/trauma.asp.

Volunteer

7. Most rape crisis hotlines and centers are dependent on a staff of volunteers who provide 24-hour, 365-day-a-year coverage. Consider volunteering your time to support their mission and work.

Advocate for Change

8. Bring about change in your community by helping people learn how to respond to sexual assault. Use the *Start by Believing* public awareness campaign, which includes presentations, posters and more: www.startbybelieving.org. This is a campaign of End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI).
9. If you are a student, ensure that your college has comprehensive resources for sexual assault survivors, including counseling and advocacy services. Make sure that the sexual assault policies meet the needs of students on your campus and are easy to navigate. Consider starting a CAASE college chapter: www.caase.org/community-engagement.

Keep Learning

10. Find more information and ways to get involved by viewing the resources under the Sexual Assault and Abuse section in the index.

¹¹www.victimservicesnetwork.org

¹²www.rainn.org

¹³www.pcar.org